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SUBJECT: SLOVAKIA SUPPORTS CUBAN DISSIDENTS, NOTES SPANISH  
"IDEOLOGICAL AFFINITY" WITH THE CASTRO REGIME

Classified By: CDA a.i. Lawrence R. Silverman for Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

1. (C) SUMMARY: At a November 8 Embassy sponsored discussion, GOS officials told us that Slovakia is working hard to promote democracy and "do the right thing" in Cuba. They outlined efforts being made by Slovak NGOs, members of parliament, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the island, and discussed their concerns that the Cuban dissident movement was "fractured," with activists on the island being at odds with the activist community in Miami. The Foreign Policy Advisor to the Slovak Chairman of Parliament told us that the Chairman -- who visited Cuban dissidents in Miami during an official visit to the United States in April -- was concerned with what he sees as Spain's "ideological affinity" towards Cuba's regime. Our interlocutors, however, demurred when asked about their opinions of the EU's suspended 2003 sanctions, which will be up for reevaluation in 2006. END SUMMARY.

#### SLOVAKIA'S THREE-PRONGED ATTACK ON CASTRO

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2. (C) On November 8, Poloff hosted an informal roundtable with officials from the MFA's Fifth Territorial (Americas) Division, the regional office of the International Republican Institute (IRI), the Office of the Chairman of Parliament, and the MFA's Human Rights Division. The GOS representatives highlighted Slovakia's active role in promoting democracy on the island, noting that there is a "three-pronged attack" on Castro. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs highlighted the activities of its Embassy in Havana in meeting with dissidents, but noted that the situation in Cuba "is tough," and that visiting MFA officials are frequently denied permission to meet with Cuban officials and are sometimes denied visas at the last moment. They support the activities of Bratislava-based NGOs, however, such as IRI and the Pontis Foundation, both of which are active in bringing dissidents and activists to Slovakia for meetings and training. Finally, Chairman of Parliament Pavol Hrusovsky has taken a personal interest in the issue; the Chairman met with the dissident community in Miami during his April official visit to the United States, and has "adopted a dissident" imprisoned in Cuba, making frequent inquiries as to his welfare. Tomas Zalesak, the Foreign Policy Advisor to Hrusovsky, told us that the dissident communities in Havana and Miami were "fractured" and that divisions among the different groups was hindering coordination and cooperation.

3. (C) Dusan Kristofik, the Director of the MFA's Americas Division, told us that Slovakia is "trying to do the right thing" in Cuba, and that if Europe was graphed onto a spectrum on the Cuba issue with "Madrid being number 1 and the Czech Republic being number 25, Slovakia would be 23 or 24." The GOS representatives were open and engaged in a discussion of the Cuba embargo at our roundtable, noting that they feel Spain is interested in the financial gains its hotel chains get from the strong trade relationship. Zalesak told us that he is concerned with the "ideological affinity" the Spanish seem to have for Castro's regime.

#### COMMENT: WAITING FOR JUNE

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4. (C) When asked about the status of the EU's suspended 2003 sanctions (currently scheduled to be re-evaluated in June 2006), our interlocutors were noncommittal. They seemed to be taking a "wait and see" approach to the attempt to affect change in Cuba through economic engagement, despite what they see as Spanish and Italian opportunism in the island's economy. More specifically, however, their game of "wait and see" may have less to do with a strategy of engagement, and more to do with waiting for "biological change" to come to Cuba's 79 year old leader.

5. (C) COMMENT, cont'd: Separately, Foreign Policy Advisor to the Prime Minister Anna Turenicova told us this summer that she believes the goal of EU "engagement" was not so much an effort to reach out to Castro as an attempt to keep communication open with working-level Cuban contacts, who will likely still be in their positions the morning after

Castro's funeral. Given the problems getting visas and traveling to Cuba, however, she wondered when EU countries will realize that this strategy is "just not happening" and give up.  
SILVERMAN

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